

NEWS RELEASE



***OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA
San Diego, California***

***United States Attorney
Carol C. Lam***

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For Immediate Release

NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY - January 28, 2005

United States Attorney Carol C. Lam announced that a federal grand jury sitting in San Diego today handed up a 25-count indictment charging a local electroplating firm and its owner with violations of the federal Clean Water Act. The indictment alleges that Victor's Premier Plating, Inc. and owner Victor Zuniga exceeded the legal limits on discharging wastewater contaminated with zinc on 19 occasions, wastewater contaminated with chromium on one occasion, and wastewater with a low (acidic) pH on four occasions, all between December 2001 and January 2003. The indictment further alleges that between October 7, 2003 and November 25, 2003, the defendants discharged wastewater without first obtaining a discharge permit. Wastewater that exceeds the limits for heavy metals such as zinc and chromium is harmful to sewage treatment plants because the metals are toxic to the bacteria that digest the sewage.

U.S. Attorney Carol C. Lam said, "Protection of our coastal waters is a matter of critical importance to the citizens of San Diego and to this office."

“With readily available technology solutions, it is easy and cost-effective for businesses to install and maintain a pre-treatment system,” said Alexis Strauss, Director of the EPA’s Water Division in the Pacific Southwest. “This is a vital step for removing harmful pollutants at their source, to protect the public wastewater plant and coastal waters downstream. The U.S. Attorney’s Office’s prosecution of this matter -- with support from EPA’s Criminal Investigation and Water Divisions -- reinforces our ongoing commitment to ensure that all comply with the nation's environmental and public health requirements.”

DEFENDANTS

Victor’s Premier Plating Inc.
Santee, California

Date of Incorporation: 10-25-97

Victor Zuniga
Chula Vista, California

SUMMARY OF CHARGES

Counts 1-25: Unlawful Discharge of Pollutants, in violation of Title 33, United States Code, Sections 1317(d) and 1319(c)(2)(A)

Maximum Penalty: 3 years in custody and/or a \$50,000 fine per day of violation (and a minimum fine of \$5,000 per day of violation)

AGENCIES

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency - Criminal Investigations Division
City of San Diego Metropolitan Wastewater Department - Industrial Wastewater Control Program
Federal Bureau of Investigation

An indictment is not evidence that the defendants committed the crimes charged. The defendants are presumed innocent until the Government meets its burden in court of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.